

CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

202 Junipero Serra Boulevard \* Stanford, California 94305

Telephone (415) 321-2052

June 19, 1974

Professor Derek Da Sola Price  
Department of History of Science  
Yale University  
New Haven, Conn. 06520

Dear Professor Price:

Following the publication of Science Indicators 72 by the National Science Board, the National Science Foundation asked the Social Science Research Council to look into the possibility of generating some scholarly activity around Science Indicators which might start an ongoing academic activity. It so happened that this year at the Center, five of us were working as an informal group on various aspects of what we have been calling Historical Sociology of Scientific Knowledge: Robert K. Merton, Joshua Lederberg, Arnold Thackray, Harriet Zuckerman and myself. The Social Science Research Council asked us whether we would organize such a conference and, after much hesitation, we agreed.

Having read Science Indicators 72 with some care, it was our impression that what was really needed here, before any strengthening of the quantitative aspects, was a more complex, qualitative social and historical analysis. Toward that end, the conference took place last week, and to our pleasant surprise--in view of our initial great skepticism--it turned out to be highly interesting and rich. As a result, it has become clear to us that it served to seed a possible ongoing activity. We hope to tell you more about our current thinking about this aspect at a later date. More immediately, we discovered during the conference that, although historical studies are indeed important, we probably underestimated the direct need for more sophisticated quantitative techniques. In particular, it appears that comparative studies of existing but conceptually divergent methods of measurement would be of special value. To redress this error of judgment, we should like to have the volume coming out of this conference represent basic currents of work by turning to a few other distinguished scholars working quantitatively in the area and asking them to contribute to it.

We very much hope that you will write a metatheoretical paper reflecting on your own quantitative methods. Since none of us can conceive of any possible readers of such a volume who would not be closely familiar with the substantive corpus of your contributions to the field, we thought that your putting your own work into broader context would be most revealing. We are thinking of the possibility of such titles as "Second Thoughts on the Measurement of Science," or "Issues of Validation of Scientific Indicators" and a piece running to a minimum of about 6000 to 7000 words.

To give you a better idea of the scope of our conference, I enclose a list of the participants and the agenda. The timetable for the volume (for which we already have a firm offer from a publishing house) is to get the papers by September 1, to ask for commentaries on these papers from other participants, and to receive the revised versions by November 1 at the latest. The organizing quintet will then meet for two weeks in January to put the final touches on the volume with publication planned for late spring 1975.

Under this plan of mutual commentaries we have another favor to ask you. Would you be so kind as to read critically and comment on the two papers by Garfield, Small and Malin and by Jonathan and Stephen Cole. If, as we hope, your answer is affirmative, we will send you the papers as they now stand and a revised version on September 1. We very much hope that you will find it interesting and worthwhile to take part in our venture and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Since our group here is dissolving next week, we have asked Mrs. Barbara Thackray (2 Chestnut Lane, Wayne, Penn. 19087) who served as secretary to the conference, to distribute mail for all our future activities. We would appreciate your writing her. I am writing this letter in my capacity as convenor of the conference and one of the editors of the volume.

With warm regards,

Your,

*Yehuda Elkana*

Yehuda Elkana

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